

Questions still unanswered regarding 60th Street leaks

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Allegations by a federal government scientist that toxic chemicals were leaking from the CECOS International hazardous waste landfills or DuPont Company's old Necco Park dump into nearby homes surfaced more than 14 months ago.

Although the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency promised to settle the issue by the end of 1985, answers to questions may not come for six months to a year.

Not only has CECOS yet to begin testing for leaks under an order the EPA issued last April, but the EPA and DuPont continue to haggle over the numbers and locations of wells the agency ordered DuPont to install in May, and the EPA's testing program for toxic contamination in the 60th Street neighborhood south of CECOS and Necco Park is on hold at least until May.

"It's a very regimented, step-by-step approach," Richard Walka, of the EPA's New York regional office, said. "We've made progress, but unfortunately it's a somewhat tedious and technically protracted arrangement."

The EPA at first adamantly rejected testing in the residential neighborhood until and unless testing near the CECOS landfills established toxic chemicals were leaking toward homes.

But the agency relented in response to demands from residents and proposed a neighborhood-wide testing program.

That computer-designed program of 200 randomly placed wells, however, depended on agreement from at least 400 homeowners to have wells dug on their property.

After a few weeks, having received that permission from 150 homeowners, the EPA

drastically reduced the neighborhood testing plan from 200 scattered wells to 12 wells clustered just south of Niagara Falls Boulevard, 12 at 60th Street and Girard Avenue, and a promise of more wells if the first results warrant further testing.

Angry neighborhood residents, claiming the EPA had not made a sincere effort to gain residents' permission for testing, launched a petition drive that in a few days collected signatures from 400 residents demanding area-wide testing.

Despite that evidence of support for the 200-well testing plan, the EPA refused to revive it.

Instead, the EPA launched an investigation of 18 industrial and suspected former toxic dump sites surrounding the neighborhood to detect possible sources of contamination other than CECOS or Necco Park.

No decision can be made on expanding the residential area testing until the results from the industrial sites and CECOS and Necco Park testing are complete sometime next summer, officials say.

"If you put wells in all over, it's difficult to determine where (toxic contamination) came from," Walka said. "We want to know whether it's leaking, based on a highly quality assured set of data, if it is, where it's going, where it's coming from, what's in it, the rate it's moving, and the real extent of the plume. Most importantly, we have to put in place a remediation plan."

"I can't guess when we'll make a decision on expanding the testing (in the neighborhood)," Pete Flynn of the EPA said. Flynn hopes to have some information on the industrial sites in time for a Jan. 16 public meeting, but he said "I'd only be speculating on when we can get the whole picture together."

